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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000148

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR A A/S CARTER AND AF/SPG  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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TAGS: ASEC PGOV PREL KPKO UN AU SU

SUBJECT: YASIR ARMAN CALLS FOR HOLISTIC APPROACH TOWARD  
SUDAN'S CHALLENGES BY NEW ADMINISTRATION

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Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: SPLM Northern Sector Chief Yasir Arman told Senior Representative for Sudan Shortley that he wants a "more holistic approach" to Sudan by the new Administration, coupling increased engagement and a powerful U.S. Special Envoy with pressure on the regime to make progress on Darfur and CPA implementation. He said that the four key issues facing Sudan (the ICC, Darfur, the 2009 National elections/political transformation, and the 2011 Referendum) should be approached comprehensively, as failure on any of these fronts may impair success on the others. He confirmed that the NCP has coalesced around President Bashir ahead of the expected ICC indictment and called for the Obama Administration to make a strategic decision regarding its "end game" in dealing with the regime: regime change or political transformation. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On February 3, 2009, Yasir Arman met with SPG Director Tim Shortley and delivered his assessment of the major issues facing Sudan. He called for the U.S. to seek deeper engagement with the regime through a Special Envoy, while maintaining pressure on the regime. "If it is seen as carrots without sticks or sticks without carrots, it won't work." He expressed excitement about local press speculation that Colin Powell could be named Special Envoy, citing Powell's stature and charisma as ingredients for success in engaging the parties and moving the agenda forward. Arman called for close cooperation between the Obama Administration and the SPLM and recommended a broad meeting between the US and the SPLM after the appointments are confirmed. He called for a comprehensive approach toward the major issues facing Sudan, rather than a "reaction-based approach" to day-by-day events on the ground.

Four Issues to be Addressed Comprehensively

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¶3. (C) ICC: Arman assessed the NCP as a united front ahead of the ICC indictment, ready to face the consequences of the ICC collectively. He reported that Vice President Ali Taha and NISS Chief Salah Ghosh intend to travel to Turkey to request support from Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan. He downplayed the chances of President Bashir losing his grip on power due to the ICC. "Bashir is in control, because at the end of the day, the army is in control, and Bashir is supported by the Army." According to Arman, the more frightened Bashir becomes of external forces, the more he will use the Army to maintain power. He speculated that if Bashir were ever to be replaced, it would be from within the Army, not the NCP. He noted that even less dramatic ramifications of the ICC could imperil the ability of the SPLM and the NCP to maintain relations.

Darfur

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¶ 14. (C) Arman views with alarm the recent upsurge in violence and increasing internationalization and regionalization of the conflict. He called for a cessation of hostilities in light of the "broad deterioration" on the ground between the battling rebel factions and the regime. He cited the unification of the Chadian rebels as cause to push for a cease fire with greater urgency. He pessimistically assessed current efforts to mediate the Darfur free-for-all, speculating that Libyan President Qaddafi will attempt to interfere with the Qatar Dialogue in efforts to engineer his own peace talks in Tripoli. He predicted that dealing with Qaddafi will be problematic, but said that a way must be found to include him as "he views Darfur as his back yard." He claimed that Egypt is also on bad terms with the Qataris and are undermining the Qatar talks.

¶ 15. (C) While the mediation efforts are stalled, JEM is growing in strength, claims Arman. Since JEM's May, 2008 "visit to Omdurman", and recent takeover of Muhajariyya, he said, they have gotten closer to their goal of a foothold in South Kordofan and are developing increasing ties with tribes in the North/South border region. As much of this growth has come at the expense of SLA/Minnawi, Arman said that Minni Minnawi has "gone a little crazy" and accused the SPLM of engineering the recent JEM visit to meet USG officials. In addition, Arman claimed that the NCP is angry at Eritrea because NISS has concluded Asmara is providing JEM with material support.

2009 Elections/Political Transformation

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¶ 16. (C) Arman argued that the 2009 national elections will fail unless there is a strong legal framework and open political environment for their success. He views the political status quo as an undeclared "NCP state of emergency", with widespread torture and arrest of the regime's opponents, heavy censorship, and a shrinking political space. He believes that the regime wants to "keep a strong grip" to repress the reality that the "NCP has no popular support." In order for the 2009 national elections to be successful, Arman calls for a fair national elections law and pressure on the regime to create an environment in which the election can be contested and conducted transparently. More fundamentally, Arman pointed out that Obama Administration faces a strategic choice - whether to pursue a policy of regime change or regime transformation through continued engagement.

Referendum

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¶ 17. (C) Arman repeatedly noted that the referendum for independence for South Sudan is only 23 months away (actually it's 30 months away assuming the CPA runs its six-year course through July of 2011, but Arman means to say that 2011 is 23 months away). He viewed all of the above issues as possible complications. However, he said that there should be greater focus on creating an improved political environment for the referendum, and warned that Darfur, Chad/Sudan violence, or the ICC could trigger a political clamp down by the NCP that could derail progress toward the referendum.

Comment

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¶ 18. (C) Arman's call for a clearer, more comprehensive approach to Sudan's myriad ills mirrors the requests of the rival NCP for a clear explanation of the new Administration's approach and end game. His comment that the Obama Administration should make a strategic choice between regime

change or engaging/pressuring the NCP toward political transformation within the current system ironically echoes the requests of his foes in the NCP for a road map going forward.

¶9. (U) Senior Representative Shortley cleared this message prior to his departure.

FERNANDEZ